

Pietro Ranzano. *Descriptio totius Italiae (Annales, XIV–XV)*.

Ministero per i Beni e le Attività 4. Edizione Nazionale dei testi della Storiografia umanistica 3. Eds. Adele di Lorenzo, Bruno Figliuolo, and Paolo Pontari. Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007. xx + 482 pp. + 4 b/w pls. index. bibl. €73. ISBN: 978–88–8450–275–9.

As the Renaissance rediscovery of classical antiquity included resurrection of the Plinian genre of chorography (region description), so the present recovery of Neo-Latin texts has revived in modern editions a number of geographical descriptions. It was the achievement of the Sicilian Dominican Pietro Ranzano (1426/27–1492/93) to compose soon after 1474 the first complete and detailed chorography of Italy in the Quattrocento. This impressive first critical edition liberates *Descriptio totius Italiae* from Ranzano's massive *Annales omnium temporum*, whose fourteenth and fifteenth books the freestanding treatise occupies. It not only promotes to prominence its humanist author (known for his history of Palermo), but also enlarges our view of chorography in the fifteenth century.

This well-conceived and well-organized volume is the third in the series Edizione Nazionale dei testi della Storiografia umanistica, which aims to provide critical editions of the historical texts written by the humanists. (Many remain either unedited in manuscript or early printed versions, or in unreliable editions.) Its eminent editors have published, *inter alia*, the definitive biographical profile of Ranzano and fundamental work on the composition and textual transmission of Biondo Flavio's *Italia illustrata*.

A detailed introduction supported by valuable recent archival and documentary research treats Ranzano's biography, intellectual formation, and cultural environment, and situates the *Descriptio* in the tradition of humanist chorography. Receiving the baton from Biondo, his principal model (others were Facio and Piccolomini), Ranzano would pass it to Leandro Alberti, a better-known Dominican who advanced the genre into the vernacular (*Descrittione di tutta Italia* [1526]). The reader may be surprised at the space devoted to comparison with Biondo's chorography, but Ranzano includes Biondo as the only Renaissance authority among fundamental sources from classical Greco-Roman and late antiquity.

After the bibliography and a thorough note to the text describing the manuscript (enhanced by illustrations in the plates), with meticulous attention to orthography, eighteen Latin chapters treat Italy and its seventeen regions. Unlike the format of The I Tatti Renaissance Library, no translation is provided. However, two levels of apparatus criticus comment on the Latin text and record its sources; and copious footnotes expand upon Ranzano's mentions of towns and cities, providing modern equivalents of the Latin back-formation toponyms: a formidable task of correlation in the tradition of Biondo himself.

Since descriptions of towns and cities, quotations from classical authors, and enumeration of a region's famous men were important components of humanist chorography, the useful indices (409–80) appropriately comprise an onomastic

index, a toponomastic index, an index of manuscripts and archival documents, an index of classical and medieval authors, an index of names, and an index to the plates.

Ranzano distinguished himself from Biondo by describing the regions of southern Italy that Biondo had projected but failed to complete. The *Descriptio* also provides dramatic evidence of the progress made by Italian humanists in the recovery of Greek learning: in the roughly twenty years separating Ranzano from Biondo, translations into Latin of Ptolemy (by Iacopo Angeli da Scarperia) and Strabo (by Guarino Veronese) enabled even humanists with little Greek to cite confidently from these authorities. Ranzano did not rely on libraries alone, but enriched his description through direct observation undertaken during his travels on administrative business. Ranzano's strong allegiance to his order is evinced by biographical notices of prominent *confratelli* associated with the regions.

Many modern readers will find chorography one of the least exciting of humanist endeavors. Mired in lists of place names, we feel far indeed from the Tuscan sun, and centuries must unfold before the picturesque description of Italy will become the essential guide for the Grand Tour. However, such texts exerted significant influence: by the 1600s, historical topographies of other European countries were feeding emerging nationalisms. Notwithstanding their authors' obvious regional allegiances, humanist chorographies open a window onto Italian culture and transmit contemporary concepts of Italy, a linguistic and religious entity long before political unification. The wealth of erudition provided here by and for specialists will repay attention from a wider audience too: scholars interested in Dominican and Southern Italian contributions to Renaissance culture, in the evolution of ancient Roman sites and their names, and in the development of Italian national identity.

CATHERINE J. CASTNER
University of South Carolina